

**Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Social Services
Office of the Commissioner
7 N. 8th St.
Richmond, VA 23219**

Commissioner's Memo No. 001

DATE: August 31, 2007
TO: Directors of Local Departments of Social Services
FROM: Anthony Conyers Jr.

Directors,

This memorandum is the first of a regular communication you will be receiving from me. My intention is to provide more information and perspective on some of the policies that are important to you as leaders of local departments.

Memo No. 001 will address:

-) [Medicaid citizenship and identity requirements](#)
-) [The 2005 Deficit Reduction Act: \\$25 child support fee, passport denial](#)

I believe that open communication is key to ensuring that our messages are shared in a clear, constant, and consistent manner. A special section has been developed on the VDSS Public site (www.dss.virginia.gov) where each of these memoranda will be published. I encourage you to share this site with your local partners, board members and other constituencies.

Thank you for your committed work, and I invite your comments and suggestions.

Impact of Medicaid Citizenship and Identity Requirements

The Medicaid Citizenship and Identity Requirements is greatly impacting departments of social services in our Commonwealth and across the country. Now that citizenship must be proven as a requirement for Medicaid eligibility, more people are relying on their local departments to help them navigate this process. And, while the citizenship and identity requirements were intended to ensure that resources for legal residents would be preserved, these intended recipients are facing greater obstacles in obtaining their Medicaid benefits. Eligible individuals continue to experience difficulties in securing needed documentation.

Recent figures from the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) indicate that children are increasingly vulnerable because of the requirements. Virginia's

FAMIS PLUS and SCHIP Medicaid Expansion experienced a net reduction of 9,527 children between July 1, 2006 (the date of implementation) and June 30, 2007. Conversely, FAMIS, which is not currently impacted by citizenship and identity requirements, reported an increase of 3,818 children to its program during the same time period.

Parents who participated in a survey by the Virginia Health Care Foundation cited an approximate four month delay in obtaining Medicaid benefits for their children. During this wait, 65% of non-insured children with a pending Medicaid application needed medical attention, with many parents opting for emergency room visits.

While localities grapple with an ever-increasing demand for services with finite resources, it is critical that social services professionals continue the important work of helping clients who have the right to Medicaid benefits obtain them – and reminding public officials of the unintended fallout impacting many of the youngest and most vulnerable people in our communities.

The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) and child support enforcement

The 2005 Deficit Reduction Act is impacting child support enforcement in two ways. Effective October 1, 2007, all states are mandated by the federal government to deduct an annual fee of \$25 when at least \$500 has been collected on a child support enforcement case. Failure to comply would result in the loss of \$55 million in federal funding for Virginia's child support enforcement services.

The Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) will collect this fee from the custodial parent since fees charged to non-custodial parents (NCPs) can only be collected after current and past-due child support has been paid. The fee will only be assessed on custodial parents who have never received public assistance.

While states did not have a choice in the matter, Virginia has been proactive in its communication. Notices have been sent to custodial parents in the child support caseload, and DCSE officials have worked with statewide media outlets to disseminate the information.

Some parents have expressed concerns about the fee. Putting the cost in perspective, it is approximately \$2 per month, and very nominal when the legal and financial services that are provided by VDSS are considered. We encourage parents to call the DCSE Customer Services Call Center at 1-800-468-8894 for further explanation.

One of the more positive aspects of the DRA is that the threshold of the Passport Denial Program has been lowered from \$5,000 to \$2,500. Given the heightened

requirements for passports, the passport denial tool will play a more important role in collecting past-due child support. This year alone, passport denial has resulted in \$1/4 million in delinquent child support collected, and has made 88,500 Virginians ineligible for a passport.

AC/VDSS